
GANZ NOTES - THE NIGHT SCHOOL, SERIES 10, NUMBER 1 - JOHN AND HIS FIRST LETTER

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PRAYER

PHEME PERKINS (1979) - "For example, 'God is love', a statement many would regard as the greatest insight and foundation of devotional Christianity, appears here in 1 John 4, not in the gospels or letters of Paul.... 1 John also insists that a person believe *in* Jesus, a flesh and blood person, as revelation of God's love and must belong to the community, which is to embody that love, if one is to be saved." (xii-xiii)

A PRAYERFUL REFLECTION ON RELIGION

Use the song "Dueling Banjos" from the movie *Deliverance* (1972) with Eric Weissberg (Banjo) and Steve Mandell (Guitar).

ORAL CULTURE BY PHEME PERKINS (1979: XII-XXIII; 1-7)

"With such things as print, Xerox, and home video cassettes, we require a high degree of correlation between one account and the next before we will say that the two are identical. **Studies of oral cultures, on the other hand, indicate that two accounts are**

considered identical if 50-60% of the words are the same. Thus, it is possible for a story or a tradition to undergo modification or even be updated to fit the environment of its hearers without its being regarded as 'changed'." (xx)

"Now imagine a world in which that experience of personal, oral debate is common fare. **No value is placed on our standard of impartial objectivity.** The point of rhetoric was to use every means possible to see that one's own position, the true and good one, prevailed over its 'bad' opposition.... There is no neutral observer.... Remember that 'opposition' is the norm for discussion in a rhetorical climate. Failure to appreciate the difference between oral culture and its rhetoric and our own 'detached' language can lead a modern reader to overestimate the severity of the problem." (xxii)

RAYMOND E. BROWN (1997:383-94)

DATE - Most likely this Letter was written soon after the Gospel of John, so about 100 CE.

SCHISM - TWO WAYS OF FRAMING IT

RAYMOND BROWN, SS - The Christians of the Johannine community, who had suffered a schism in their community. The schism was spawned by two different understandings of Jesus. Both groups believed that Jesus was divine, the Word of God. But the groups split over the issue of the significance of Jesus being *enfleshed*. **Group 1** (one of whom wrote this Letter) believed in the essential importance of Jesus' *human* existence, which was not just a *container* for the divine Jesus (the Docetist heresy) but was itself a part of the revelation of the Word in this world. **Group 2** (the schismatic group, against whom this Letter is written, called "liars" or "antichrists" or "those who went out from us") believed that the human existence of Jesus was only accidental, that his actions "in the flesh" did not matter. For them what mattered was *simply believing in the Word*. For **Group 1** it mattered *how* one lived one's human life from now on (the Letter refers to this as "walking" as Christ did), for in Jesus was revealed God's way of being a human being. For **Group 2**, the humanity of Jesus did not matter, and so in that humanity there was no summons to act as Jesus did – "believing" not "walking" was all that was required.

WILLIAM BARCLAY - One result was that there were members of the Church who found that the standards which Christianity demanded were becoming a burden and who were tired of making the effort. They did not want to be *saints* in the New Testament sense of the term. The New Testament word for *saint* is *hagios*, which is also

commonly translated as *holy*. Its basic meaning is *different*. The Temple was *hagios* because it was *different* from other buildings; the Sabbath was *hagios* because it was *different* from other days; the Jewish nation was *hagios* because it was *different* from other nations; and Christians were called to be *hagios* because they were called to be *different* from other men and women. **There was always a distinct division between Christians and the world.** In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus says: 'If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you' (John 15:19). 'I have given them your word,' said Jesus in his prayer to God, 'and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world' (John 17:14).¹

THE IDEA OF HERESY/HETERODOXY

It is a significant achievement in thought when one gets clear about what he or she does *not* mean. But there is also an important achievement of thought, and charity, when a group is able to affirm contradictory opinions, as if it were clear to that group that it is in *the tension of contradictory thoughts* that the truth, eventually, will out.

The Oxford English Dictionary –

Etymology: < Old French *eresie, heresie* (12th cent.), modern French *hérésie*, < Latin type **heresia* (whence also Italian *eresia*, Portuguese *heresia*), for Latin *hæresis* a school of thought, philosophical sect, in ecclesiastical writers, theological heresy, < Greek *αἵρεσις* **taking, choosing, choice, course taken, course of action or thought, 'school' of thought, philosophic principle or set of principles, philosophical or religious sect;** < *αἰρεῖν* to take, middle voice *αἰρῖσθαι* to take for oneself, choose.

The Greek word occurs several times in the New Testament, viz. Acts. v. 17, xv. 5, xxiv. 5, xxvi. 5, xxviii. 22, where English versions from Tyndale render 'sect' (i.e. of the Sadducees, Pharisees, Nazarenes or Christians, considered as sects of the Jews); Acts xxiv. 14, where all versions from Wyclif to 1611 have 'heresy', Revised Version 'a sect (or heresy)'; in 1 Corinthians xi. 19 Wyclif, Geneva, Rhemish, and 1611 have 'heresies', Tyndale and Cranmer 'sectes', Revised

¹ William Barclay, [*The Letters of John and Jude*](#), 3rd ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 4.

Version 'heresies (or factions)'; in Galatians v. 20, Wyclif, Tyndale, Cranmer, Rhemish have 'sectes', Geneva and 1611 'heresies', Revised Version 'heresies (or parties)'; in 2 Peter ii. 1 Wyclif, Tyndale, Cranmer, Rhemish have 'sectes', Geneva and 1611 'heresies', Revised Version 'heresies (or sects)'. **The earlier sense-development from 'religious sect, party, or faction' to 'doctrine at variance with the catholic faith', lies outside English.**

PRIMARILY NARRATIVE THOUGHT (getting the Story right; how the Story is told; to whom it is told on any particular occasion) – **the kerygmatic stage of the truth.** The *Oxford English Dictionary* – **Etymology:** < Greek κήρυγμα proclamation, preaching, < κηρύσσειν to proclaim.

Being still at the formative stage, the theology of the early centuries exhibits the extremes of immaturity and sophistication. There is an extraordinary contrast, for example, between the versions of the Church's teaching given by the second-century Apostolic Fathers and by an accomplished fifth-century theologian like Cyril of Alexandria. **Further, conditions were favourable to the coexistence of a wide variety of opinions even on issues of prime importance.** Modern students are sometimes surprised at the diversity of treatment accorded by even the later fathers to such a mystery as the Atonement; and it is a commonplace that certain fathers (Origen is the classic example) who were later adjudged heretics counted for orthodox in their lifetimes. **The explanation is not that the early Church was indifferent to the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. Rather it is that, while from the beginning the broad outline of revealed truth was respected as a sacrosanct inheritance from the apostles, its theological explication was to a large extent left unfettered.** ²

RULE OF FAITH (only one correct meaning; required to memorize; heterodoxy vs orthodoxy; identification of who is right and who is wrong; censorship; control) –

Bernard Marthaler, *The Creed - the Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology*. 3d ed. New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, [1987 and 1993] 2007.

² J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fifth, Revised. (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 1977), 3-4.

From Kerygma to Creed: “On the first Pentecost, Peter with the Eleven was driven by an inner compulsion to *proclaim* what they had seen and heard and, yes, felt.” (Marthaler: 2). **The kerygma is essentially a story:** Who was he? What happened? How did we come to know and understand Jesus? Compare the concreteness expressed in 1 John 1:1-4.

As the story was told and retold, certain essential elements consistently show themselves. See an OT example at Deuteronomy 26:5-9. *When* things happened; how warm the day was; who was present at the time; *where* it happened can all be allowed to go vague, but the *meaning* of the event must stay consistent in each telling of the story ... *otherwise one is not telling the same story*. **This is the abiding difficulty of narrative as principal carrier of meaning: the meaning is too influenced by the teller, too specific to the narrator.**

It is important (Ganz, 17 January 2017) in the kerygmatic telling for the Teller to include **what it feels like** to experience this Story as alive now. In other words, every Story contains within the telling a desire in the Teller **to involve his or her Hearers** in the story. A kerygmatic Teller never just lays out the facts. **The affect the Teller wants to activate in the Hearer is an essential part of the Telling.** Think of Abraham Heschel’s great insight about the OT Prophets – how they not only spoke/shared God’s words to His people, but they also revealed God’s affect.

Bernard Marthaler, *The Creed*³ – concerning the “steps” in the formation of the creedal convictions from “kerygma” to “rule of faith” –

The Creed as Rule of Faith (*regula fidei*). “The fourth century marks a further transition in the history and function of the creed. The creed that began as a corporate and personal expression of faith is made to serve as **a test of orthodoxy, a *regula fidei* – ‘rule of faith’.**” (Marthaler: 9) Recall here the Patristic idea of a creed as a *password (symbola distincta)* “that military commanders gave to their troops so that the soldiers could identify themselves to one another and be distinguished from the enemy (in Rufinus of Aquileia, d. 410).” Note the elements in this imagery: (a) the context is battle, conflict, enemies; (b) a way of distinguishing one’s own *in the midst of* an uncountable multitude; (c) there exists an organized relation between commander and soldiers.

³ Bernard Marthaler, *The Creed - the Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology*. 3d ed. New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, [1987 and 1993] 2007.

On the “types” of Christian believers, East and West -

Deeply suspicious of, even hostile to, philosophy, the former [the Roman West] limited the function of theology to expounding the doctrines set out in Holy Scripture; they applauded¹ **the simple believers who were content with *the rule of faith***. The latter [the Greek East], on the other hand, went so far as to distinguish **two types of Christianity, with two grades of Christians corresponding to them**. The first and lower type was based on ‘faith’, i.e. the literal acceptance of the truths declared in Scripture and the Church’s teaching, while the second and higher type was described as ‘*gnosis*’, i.e. an esoteric form of knowledge. This started with the Bible and tradition, indeed was founded on them, **but its endeavour was to unravel their deeper meaning, and in the light of it to explore the profounder mysteries of God and His universe and scheme of salvation; it was supposed to culminate in mystical contemplation or ecstasy. Thus they divided the faithful into simple believers, whom they tended to disparage, and ‘spiritual’ men, ‘gnostics’ or ‘perfect’, whom they regarded as specially privileged by God.**⁴

ON INCARNATE WORK VS. “PURE REASON” -

“The contrast between these recent ugly displays and our time with the carpenters was so stark, so arresting, that I could not stop thinking about it. The daughter of a professor, I had always venerated the life of the mind, the idea of the ivory tower, a place set above and apart – even while recognizing the day-to-day flawed reality. But I have started lately to wonder if there is something inherently pernicious in a life devoted exclusively to the mind. In Dorothy Sayers’s *Gaudy Night*, the protagonist Harriet Vane ponders this very question after a particularly disturbing murder is committed in one of the Oxford colleges. **Absent a grounding in the physical, in the stuff of daily life, does one necessarily “lose touch” with reality? Does some sort of distortion occur that**

¹ E.g., Irenaeus, *haer.* 2, 26, 1; Tertullian, *de praescr.* 14, 1–3.

⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fifth, Revised. (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 1977), 4–5.

permits, indeed encourages, the incubation of perverse and destructive ideas?⁵

OVERARCHING PURPOSE OF FIRST LETTER OF JOHN

We are talking about Someone we actually knew, in person, and with Whom we walked and talked. We are talking about our personal experience of HIM – what Jesus was like; the effects He had on us and on everyone; we are talking about Someone Whom we love and miss.

And the amazing fact is that we who *knew* Him in this way *know* Him still ... when we become the people that He made us to become, the people we learned to want to become. In our commitment to each other in the way that He taught us, demonstrated to us, we really do feel that He still lives, and with us.

EYEWITNESS - The clearest and most definite claim of the author of the first letter to be an eyewitness is found in its opening words (1:1, 3). He is announcing his particular emphasis. What he proclaims concerning the word of life, the gospel, he says is ‘that which was from the beginning, which we have heard ... seen ... touched ...’ **His message is supremely concerned with the historical, audible, visible, tangible manifestation of the eternal. He could hardly have conveyed his meaning more forcefully. He is vouching for his message from his own personal experience.** It consists not of ‘cleverly invented stories’ (2 Pet. 1:16), but of a historical revelation verified by the three highest of the five human senses: hearing, sight and touch.⁶

So, verse 4 must be understood also to look beyond this life to the life of heaven. Then consummated fellowship will bring completed joy. ‘You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand’ (Ps. 16:11). It is to this ultimate end that he who *was from the beginning ... appeared* in time, and that what the apostles heard, saw and touched they have proclaimed to us. The substance of the apostolic proclamation was the historical manifestation of the eternal; its purpose was and is a

⁵ Published on 18 January 2022 in *First Things* - Kari Jenson Gold’s most recent piece for *First Things* was “Give My Regards to New York.” See: <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/01/jesus-the-carpenter>.

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 30.

fellowship with one another, which is based on fellowship with the Father and the Son and which issues in fullness of joy.⁷

BELIEVING “IN” GOD

From Henri de Lubac, SJ (1896-1991), *The Splendor of the Church* (published in French in 1953; in English in 1956).

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And whereas the Creed, which is a declaration of faith — *protestatio* or *confessio fidei*⁶³ — and thus a “symbol”, says “I believe in God”, the Act of Faith, as formulated for us by the catechism, says “My God, I believe in you.” Understood in this way, faith contains in its “alpha” as in its “omega” **a personal element distinguished by the characteristic that it can concern God alone.** It is ecclesial in its mode (if one may put it so) but theological in object and principle.⁶⁴

This linguistic analysis is nothing new. Let us listen for a moment to Blessed Marie of the Incarnation [1599-1672], as she teaches the elements of Christian doctrine to her young Ursuline sisters at Tours at the beginning of the seventeenth century:

I believe in God. We add that particle *in*, which indicates a certain motion of the understanding which believes. Thus, when we say, “I believe in God”, it is as if

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 70.

⁶³ “Haec est confessionis nostris fides exposita”, as the Council of Toledo was to say (J. Madoz, S.J., *Le Symbole du XIe Concile de Tolède* [1938], p. 26).

⁶⁴ This brief analysis — which it would be irrelevant to work out further here — links up with that made from another standpoint by Fr. Paul Demann, “Foi juive et foi chrétienne”, in CS (1952). Fr. Demann makes a distinction between the two aspects, which he describes as theological and doctrinal, of the act of faith; these aspects are inseparable and complementary and may be further described as “personal” and “objective”, respectively (pp. 94–95).

we said “I do not only believe that there is a God, but I believe it in such a way that I try, with all the affection of my heart and with all my strength, to reach him as Sovereign Good and the End for which I have been created.” Thus, Christian hope is in a way enclosed within the faith which we profess.⁶⁵

Eight centuries earlier, St. Paschasius Radbertus [785-865 CE] had put something similar in slightly greater detail:

No one can say, properly speaking, “I believe in my neighbor” or in an angel or in any creature whatsoever. Throughout Holy Scripture you will find the correct use of this profession reserved to God alone... We say, and rightly, “I believe concerning this man” as we say “I believe concerning God”; but we do not believe *in* this man, or any other. For they are not themselves truth, or goodness, or light, or life; they do no more than participate in these. And that is why, when in the Gospel our Lord wishes to show that he is of one substance with the Father, he says “You believe in God; believe also in me” (Jn 14:1). For if he were not God, we should not have to believe *in* him; by using this word he revealed himself as God to his chosen ones.

Therefore, do not let us say “I believe *in* the holy catholic Church”, but rather, cutting out the syllable “in”, let us say “I believe the holy catholic Church” and “the life everlasting” and “the resurrection of the body”. Otherwise, we shall seem to “believe in” man, which is forbidden to us. **We believe in God alone and in his unique majesty.**⁶⁶

One is struck equally by the power and the uniqueness of the fundamental affirmation of our *Credo*. **Faustus of Riez [born in Roman Britain; d. 495 CE], in a passage destined to be quoted and commented on more than once, says: “To believe in God is to seek him in faith, to hope piously in him, and to pass into him by a movement of choice.**

⁶⁵ *Explication des mystères de la foi*, 3d ed. (1678), p. 9.

⁶⁶ *De fide, spe et caritate*, bk. 1, chap. 6, nos. 1-2 (PL 120, 1402-4).

When I say that I believe in him, I confess him, offer him worship, adore him, give myself over to him wholly and transfer to him all my affection."⁶⁷ ⁸

ON BEING "IN LOVE"

Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology*: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan) (pp. 100-102). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.

Then one's being becomes **being-in-love**. Such being-in-love has its antecedents, its causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it has blossomed forth and as long as it lasts, it takes over. It is the first principle. From it flow one's desires and fears, one's joys and sorrows, one's discernment of values, one's decisions and deeds.

Being-in-love is of different kinds. There is the love of intimacy, of husband and wife, of parents and children. There is the love of one's fellow men with its fruit in the achievement of human welfare. There is the love of God with one's whole heart and whole soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength (Mark 12.30). It is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Romans 5.5). It grounds the conviction of St Paul that 'there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8.38–39).

As the question of God is implicit in all our questioning, **so being in love with God is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality.**

That fulfilment brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. That fulfilment brings a radical peace, the peace that the world cannot give. That fulfilment bears fruit in a love of one's neighbor that strives mightily to bring about the kingdom of God on this earth. On the other hand, the

⁶⁷ *De Spiritu Sancto*, bk. 1, chap. 1: "Credere illi cuilibet potes homini; credere vero in illum, soli te debere noveris majestati. Sed et hoc ipsum aliud est, Deum credere, aliud in Deum credere. Esse Deum et diabolus credere dicitur.... In Deum vero credere, nisi qui pie in eum speravit, non probatur. In Deum ergo credere, hoc est fideliter eum quaerere, est tota in eum dilectione transire. Credere ergo in illum, hoc est dicere; confiteor illum, colo illum, adoro illum, totum me in jus ejus ac dominium trado atque transfundo" (p. 103 in Engelbrecht's edition; PL 62, 10c–d, under the name of Paschasius the Deacon).

⁸ Henri de Lubac, [*The Splendor of the Church*](#), trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 33–35.

absence of that fulfilment opens the way to the trivialization of human life in the pursuit of fun, to the harshness of human life arising from the ruthless exercise of power, to despair about human welfare springing from the conviction that the universe is absurd.

3 - Religious Experience⁹ -

Being in love with God, as experienced, is being in love in an unrestricted fashion. All love is self-surrender but being in love with God is being in love without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations.

EPHESUS

Ephesus may also have served as a hub for the Christians most directly nurtured by the Johannine literature of the New Testament. Tradition associates the apostle John with Ephesus, as well as John the Elder (the author of 1–3 John).³ Christians in Ephesus were explicitly included among the congregations addressed by the visionary author of Revelation (Rev 1:11), not only in the oracle of the glorified Christ spoken to them specifically (Rev 2:1–7) but by Revelation as a whole, which spoke a poignant word to Christians in a city so supportive of the Roman imperial cult and Roman economy.⁴¹⁰

⁹ Lonergan - 642B0DTE070 (Dublin 1971) 5–8 treats the material in this and the preceding section in terms of the ‘room’ in us for grace and then of grace as the fundamental answer to the question of God. Of note is the affirmation that ‘if your philosophy, fundamentally, is a philosophy not of metaphysics but of interiority, your approach to grace has to be in the same order; it has to have something to do with experience. **Treating grace in that way will call for, first of all, a consideration of the room in us for grace; and, secondly, the nature of the experience of grace; something has to be said of that; and thirdly, the distribution of grace; and fourthly, the relation of grace to faith; and, finally, the relation of faith and beliefs.**’ [Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology*: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan) (p. 438, footnote 8). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.]

^{*3} See discussion in Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 241–92.

^{*4} See David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 37–63, 104–9, 198–209, 235–38.

¹⁰ David A. deSilva, [“The Social and Geographical World of Ephesus \(Acts 18:19–21, 24; 19:1–41; 20:16–17; Ephesians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:3; Revelation 1:11; 2:1\),”](#) in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks, and Doug Mangum, Lexham Geographic Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 538.

THE BURDEN OF THOUGHT

As Christians we believe and hope – but that is, in itself surely, the Church’s characteristic too? **She is – as we shall see later – the assemblage of the faithful, that is, of believers, in the primary and fundamental sense of that phrase; the union of those who “call upon the name of the Lord”¹⁴ and await his second coming.** As His Holiness Pope Pius XII reminded us, when speaking of the laity, **we are the Church ourselves,¹⁵** and since this is so, *it would seem as if there were in this reflexive activity a danger such as that which threatens the man who wants to be a spectator at his own prayer.* For if you turn back in contemplation of yourself instead of contemplating the object of your faith and invoking that of your hope, the recoil and self-regarding involved seem likely to put a sort of filter between your spiritual vision and the reality that is the object of the faith and hope alike.

The danger should not be underestimated. **The business of reflection is always tricky; powerful forces are brought into play, and there is more than one misapplication of them that can prove dangerous to us.** The false way of subjectivism is particularly hard to recognize, and there are innumerable approaches to it. In any case, danger lies on every side in the life of the mind, and even more so in the life of faith; after all, it lies on every side in life at the bodily level too. Yet forewarned is forearmed; if we do nothing but brood over this danger, we only increase it and hypnotize ourselves helpless in the face of it. **To run away from all danger is to run away from all responsibility and indeed from action itself; ultimately, it is the refusal of vocation as such.** To behave in such a way is often to accept defeat in advance, much as we hate to admit to the fact. And all the danger in the world cannot release us from a task that has become necessary.¹¹

We cannot avoid the problems of our own day, any more than we can excuse ourselves from its tasks or run away from its battles. If we are to live in the Church, then we have to become involved with the problems she faces now, and the assent of our intelligence is owed to her doctrine as we find it set out today. **It would be a big mistake for us to think that we could ever rediscover the faith of the past in its exact tenor and all its**

¹⁴ Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13; 4:24–25. Cf. L. Cerfaux, *Le Christ dans la théologie de St. Paul* (1951), pp. 260–61.

¹⁵ Allocution of February 20, 1946 (*Documentation catholique* [1946], col. 176).

¹¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 19–20.

richness, at the expense of all that has been clarified since: a big mistake too, even granting that the thing were legitimate in itself. If you reject the fruit and blossom of the live branch, then it is, as far as you are concerned, a dead one.¹²

GEORGE STROUP

George W. Stroup, "[Theological Perspective on 1 John 1:1-2:2](#)," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 394–398.

Is there life after Easter? Not after the first Easter, but after the many Easters that have followed the first, when, to use perhaps the autobiographical words of Paul Tillich, "year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage"?¹ The author of 1 John, writing near the end of the first century, had not seen as many Easters come and go since the first one as had Tillich, and apparently the author still believed that "it is the last hour" (2:18), **but he was deeply concerned about his community's understanding of the gospel, especially since there were those intent on deceiving the community, perhaps even denying that Jesus is the Christ (2:22)**. How should those he addresses repeatedly as "little children" live as one Easter turns into another and as Jesus' followers continue to find their lives marred by sin?

The writer invokes three theological themes: the *koinonia* Christians have in Christ with God and with one another; the reality and deceptive power of sin; and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is these three themes, taken together, that provide Christians hope as we continue to struggle with sin as one Easter turns into another and "the longed-for perfection of life does not appear."

First, when there is uncertainty concerning the meaning of the gospel, the writer appeals not to a creed or to some formal set of beliefs but to a *koinonia* or fellowship, to a

¹² Henri de Lubac, [The Splendor of the Church](#), trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 21.

¹ Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 161–62.

communion, that the writer has “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1:3). Readers share fellowship and communion with the author insofar as they also share communion with the Father and his Son and with one another. **Truth, therefore, is not so much a doctrine as it is fellowship with the Father and his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. That fellowship is not based primarily on ideas or philosophical principles but on a person who could be seen and heard and touched – not a spirit or some gnostic savior but a flesh-and-blood human being.** He is a unique human being, to be sure, because he is also the “word of life” (1:2) who lived at a particular time and in a particular place, and yet who at the same time was “from the beginning” (1:1), “the eternal life that was with the Father” (1:2).

Second, our text confesses a paradox concerning the reality and mystery of sin. On the one hand, what has been made known or revealed in Jesus Christ is “that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1:5). **The world, therefore, is sharply divided between those who live in the light and those who live in the darkness, between those who know the truth and live it and those who are liars.** To have fellowship with this Christ, who, according to John’s Gospel, is himself the light of the world, is to walk in the light, and to walk in the light is to not sin. “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (2:1).

On the other hand, our text recognizes that while Christians should not sin, they continue to do so, and their continuing sinfulness belies what they confess with their lips. They are liars and hypocrites, and the truth is not in them. They may say they are the children of light, but they are self-deceived when they say they have no sin (1:8). **They are caught in a vicious cycle of self-deception from which there is no escape. To be self-deceived is to be unable to recognize one’s own deception and to be unable to recognize the truth about oneself.**

Our text recognizes the mystery of sin – part of which is its power to deceive. Genesis 3 describes the consequences of the “first sin” as an impulse to hide. Adam and Eve hide themselves behind loin cloths and then hide in the shadows of the garden. They hide from God and from one another by blaming someone other than themselves for their sin (“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree” [Gen. 3:12]). “The dishonesty which is an inevitable concomitant of sin,” wrote Reinhold Niebuhr, “must be regarded neither as purely ignorance, nor yet as involving a conscious lie in each individual instance.”² Because sin is both an act and a state or condition, sinners can neither extricate themselves from their self-deception nor claim

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 1:204.

victimization and deny their responsibility for it. They are utterly dependent on something (or someone) other than themselves to free them from their lie.

The good news, according to this text, is that those who live in communion with the Father have an advocate, “Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1), who is the atoning sacrifice for their sins – indeed, for the sins of the whole world. Because he is faithful and just, even when those who have communion with him are unrighteous, his followers may confess their sins, receive forgiveness, and be cleansed from their unrighteousness. While the writer files no brief for any particular theory of the atonement, the communion Christians have with God and one another is mediated by “the blood of Jesus his Son” (1:7). Christians who live in communion with God need not deny that they are sinners, or pretend that shadows do not continue to fall across their journey toward the light. They should not despair when in the days and weeks that follow Easter the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, because in the communion they have with God they have an advocate, Jesus the Son, who is righteous, even when they are not, and it is his truthfulness, his atoning sacrifice, that calls them out of the shadows and enables them, with confidence and not in terror, to confess their sins and to walk toward the light.

GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE LETTER

How plain, how full, and how deep a compendium of genuine Christianity!”¹ Thus did John Wesley (1703–91) estimate the First Epistle of John. As three of the canon’s catholic or general epistles (along with James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude), the Johannine letters have justly enjoyed esteem disproportionate to their size. As well as rewards, these texts offer their interpreters some mysteries.¹³

Regrettably, pitched conflict is as much a part of our past as it is of our present, no less in Christianity than in other religions. **However, we assess the responses of early Johannine Christians, the issues that these letters raise – among others, the maintenance of confessional integrity and the potential for congregational self-destruction – must be faced by Christians in every age.** Finally, this literature does not

¹ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 21: *Journal and Diaries IV (1755–65)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992) 427 (journal entry for Thursday, September 1, 1763).

¹³ C. Black, “[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#),” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 365.

invite rendition in a minor key. The Johannine letters assure Christians of their calling, grounded not in their own ability under stress but in God's enduring, self-sacrificial love for them. First John's confidence was abundantly clear to Martin Luther (1483–1546): "This is an outstanding epistle. It can buoy up afflicted hearts. Furthermore, it has John's style and manner of expression, so beautifully and gently does it picture Christ to us."³⁷ What Luther implies, Wesley states outright in a comment that for many readers of these epistles still rings true: "And in [addressing his contemporaries, the elder] speaks to the whole Christian church in all succeeding ages."^{38 14}

N.T. Wright (2011) - The 'early Christian letters' in this book are short, sharp and to the point. They are full of clear practical advice for Christians taking their early steps in the faith and needing to know where the problems were going to come and what resources they could find to cope with them. **But they also breathe the fresh air of delight in a new-found faith, hope and life. They are full of wonder at the fact of Jesus himself, at what he'd done in giving his life to rescue people, at what he had revealed about who God himself is.** They are realistic in facing the dangers a Christian community will meet in the world around, trying to squash the church into its own ways of life and to stifle the rumour that the living God might be on the loose. And they are equally realistic in highlighting difficulties which may arise within the community itself. They draw richly on the ancient scriptures of Israel **to help give the young Christians that all-important sense of depth in discovering who they really are within God's love and purposes;** and they range widely across issues of everything from politics to private life. They are a vital resource for every church and every Christian. So here they are: *Early Christian Letters for Everyone!*¹⁵

³⁷ Martin Luther, "Lectures on the First Epistle of St. John," *Luther's Works*, vol. 10. *The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967) 219.

³⁸ John Wesley, "Spiritual Worship" (sermon 77), in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3: *Sermons 71–114*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986) 89.

¹⁴ C. Black, "[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#)," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 377–378.

¹⁵ Tom Wright, [Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John and Judah](#), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), x–xi.

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Very little can be said with confidence about the author of these documents. Like the Fourth Gospel, the First Epistle of John is anonymous. The sender of 2 John (v. 1) and 3 John (v. 1) identifies himself, not as "John," but as ὁ πρεσβύτερος (*ho presbyteros*, "the elder"), a designation patient of alternative interpretations (see the Commentary on 2 John 1). While the matter is beyond knockdown proof, the Second and Third Epistles are sufficiently similar to 1 John, stylistically and substantively, to suggest that "the elder" authored all three letters (cf. 1 John 2:7; 3:11/2 John 5–6; 1 John 3:6/3 John 11). This commentary will proceed from the assumption that the Johannine letters were composed by the same author, who, for the sake of convenience, will be referred to as "the elder."¹⁷

A JOHANNINE COMMUNITY/SCHOOL/SECT?

Close verbal and conceptual similarities that obtain between the Gospel and epistles of John were noted earlier in this introduction. **The letters of John apparently drew from, and exemplify, a discrete Johannine tradition within primitive Christianity.** Whether this tradition manifested itself sociologically as a "sect" or a "school" has been much discussed in the past twenty-five years; predictably, judgments in that matter depend greatly on how those terms are defined.¹⁹ For the purpose of this commentary one need only observe that 1 John implies, and 2 John (v. 1) and 3 John (v. 1) expressly indicate,

^{*1} John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 21: *Journal and Diaries IV (1755–65)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992) 427 (journal entry for Thursday, September 1, 1763).

¹⁶ C. Black, "[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#)," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 365.

¹⁷ C. Black, "[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#)," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 365.

^{*19} Noteworthy are the studies by Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 44–72; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools*, SBLDS 26 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975); and D. Moody Smith, "Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on Its Character and Delineation," *NTS* 21 (1976) 222–48.

the existence of different Christian congregations within a Johannine network, for which those letters' author assumes an advisory and perhaps supervisory responsibility. The situation seems similar to that in Revelation 1–3, where John of Patmos issues encouragement and warning to a nearby circle of seven churches in Asia Minor. **At the time of the composition of the Johannine epistles, the communities addressed by the elder showed signs of disintegrating** (on which, see below).¹⁸

BEFORE OR AFTER THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

Because the positions one takes about the Johannine epistles seriously affect the perspective from which one reads the Fourth Gospel, it is necessary that *Reading John* include not only an interpretation of the Gospel of John but also a survey of 1, 2, and 3 John. **The dominant construct in current research regards the Fourth Gospel as written before the epistles and as dealing with the problems related to Christian exclusion from the synagogues and sees the epistles as written after the Gospel and dealing with a community conflict between orthodox and progressives over the proper interpretation of the Fourth Gospel** (e.g., R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* [New York: Paulist, 1979]; J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1979], and “Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community,” *The Gospel of John in Christian History* [New York: Paulist, 1978], 90–121). **This volume, however, contends that the Gospel of John was written either after 1, 2, 3 John or at about the same time and that it deals with some of the same problems** (as e.g., F. F. Segovia, “The Theology and Provenance of John 15:1–17,” *JBL* 101 [1982]: 115–28; Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984; and Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996]). Evidence for this assertion will be presented in part at the end of the upcoming survey of the epistles and in part throughout the commentary on the Fourth Gospel.¹⁹

¹⁸ C. Black, [“The First, Second, and Third Letters of John,”](#) in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 369–370.

JBL The Journal of Biblical Literature

¹⁹ Charles H. Talbert, [Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles](#), Rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 3–4.

The natural place in which to look for information about the authorship of any ancient letter is in the letter itself. It was customary in antiquity for a correspondent to begin by announcing his identity. This was Paul's invariable rule, and the same holds good of the letters of Peter, James and Jude. The author of 2 and 3 John styles himself 'the elder' without disclosing his name. **Only the letter to the Hebrews and the first letter of John begin without any announcement of the author's name or title, and indeed without any introductory greeting.** The anonymity of 1 John is not to be explained by the suggestion that the author is writing a theological treatise, or even a general or 'catholic' letter, as Origen first called it. **Although it has a considerable theological content, it contains a genuinely personal message addressed to a particular congregation, or group of them, in a particular situation (cf. 2:19). The 'I – you – we' form of address is maintained throughout; the recipients of the letter are the author's 'dear children' or 'dear friends', whose spiritual history and present circumstances he knows.** Moreover, 'the writing is ... instinct from first to last with intense personal feeling' (Westcott). It is a truly pastoral letter, sent by a pastor to his flock, or a part of it, as are also (and even more clearly) the two shorter letters.²⁰

Even a superficial reading of the Gospel and the first letter reveals a striking similarity between the two in both subject-matter and syntax. The general subjects treated are much the same. **It has often been pointed out that the author of each has the same love of opposites set in stark contrast to one another – light and darkness, life and death, love and hate, truth and falsehood – while people are said to belong to one or other of two categories, with no third alternative. They are children of God or children of the devil; they belong to the world or do not belong to the world. They have life or do not have life. They know God or do not know him.** In style one is aware of what Westcott called 'the same monotonous simplicity of construction', and the same Hebraic love of parallelism.²¹

Westcott B. F. Westcott, *Commentary on the Epistles of St John* (1883; Eerdmans, 1966).

²⁰ John R. W. Stott, [*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 17–18.

Westcott B. F. Westcott, *Commentary on the Epistles of St John* (1883; Eerdmans, 1966).

²¹ John R. W. Stott, [*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 21.

Nevertheless, there is no hard evidence to support the composition of 1, 2, or 3 John by John the apostle and son of Zebedee, an inference challenged as early as 130 ce by Papias of Hierapolis.⁶ Likewise, Dionysius of Alexandria (d. c. 264) expressed doubt that John of Patmos, the author of Revelation (Rev 1:9; cf. Rev 1:1, 4; 22:8), had written either John's epistles or the Gospel of John.⁷ The authorship of the Johannine letters remains a mystery. Unlike many patristic interpreters, however, we may safely regard these letters' continuing benefit for the church as both logically and theologically independent of their authorship. If "the elder" did not consider the verification of his identity crucial for his message's validity, then neither need we.²²

So far, then, we have suggested that the similarities of subject-matter, style and vocabulary in the Gospel and the first letter supply very strong evidence for identity of authorship, which is not materially weakened by the peculiarities of each or the differences of emphasis in the treatment of common themes. These are explained by the distinctive purpose behind each writing and by the lapse of time which can therefore be assumed between them. The similarity between Gospel and letter is considerably greater than that between the third Gospel and the Acts, which are known to have come from the same pen....²³

UNITY OF TEACHING BETWEEN GOSPEL OF JOHN AND FIRST LETTER

When we compare the occurrence of precise phrases in both Gospel and first letter, we find that in fact **the same divine purpose or scheme of salvation is set forth in almost identical terms.** It might be summarized as follows, the reference in the letter being printed first in each parenthesis: In our natural and unredeemed state we are both 'of the devil', who has sinned and lied and murdered 'from the beginning' (3:8/8:44), and 'of the world' (2:16; 4:5/8:23; 15:19). We therefore 'sin' (3:4/8:34) and 'have' it (1:8/9:41),

^{*6} See Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39–3–4.

d. Codex Bezae, fifth-century bilingual (Greek and Latin) manuscript of the Gospels and Acts

^{*7} *Ibid.*, 7.25.18–23. See R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994). This work is a definitive study of the figure of John in Christian antiquity. On traditions related to the Johannine letters, see 89–95.

²² C. Black, "[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#)," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 366.

²³ John R. W. Stott, [The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 27–28.

'walk in the darkness' (1:6; 2:11/8:12; 12:35) and are spiritually 'blinded' (2:11/12:40) and 'dead' (3:14/5:25). But God loved us and sent his Son to be 'the Saviour of the world' (4:14/4:42) and that 'we might live' (4:9/3:16). This was his 'one and only' (*monogenēs*, 4:9/1:14, 18; 3:16, 18), who, though in or from 'the beginning' (1:1/1:1), yet became, or came in, 'flesh' (4:2/1:14) and then 'laid down his life' for us (3:16/10:11-18), in order to 'take away' sin (3:5/1:29). To him 'testimony' has been borne, partly by those who have 'seen' and therefore 'proclaimed' (1:2-3; 4:14/1:34; 19:35), but especially by God himself (5:9/3:33; 5:32, 34, 36, 37) and by the Spirit (5:6/15:26). We should 'accept' this divine testimony (5:9/3:11, 32, 33; 5:34), 'believe' in the One thus adequately attested (5:10/5:37-40) and 'acknowledge' him (4:2, 3/9:22). Believing in him or his 'name' (5:13/1:12, etc.), we pass from death to life (3:14/5:24). We 'have life' (5:11, 12/3:15, 36; 20:31), for life is in the Son of God (5:11, 12/1:4; 14:6). This is to be 'born of God' (2:29; 3:9; 5:4, 18/1:13).

Those who have been born of God, God's 'children' (3:1, 2, 10; 5:2/1:12; 11:52), are variously described, in relation to God, to Christ, to the truth, to each other, and to the world. They are 'of God' (3:10/8:47) and have come to 'know' God, the true God, through Jesus Christ (5:20/17:3). It may even be said that they have 'seen' God (3:6; cf. 3 John 11/14:9), although in the literal sense No-one has ever seen God (4:12, 20/1:18; 6:46). Christians are not only of God but of the truth as well (2:21; 3:19/18:37). The truth is also 'in' them (1:8; 2:4/8:44) and they 'do' it (av) or 'live by' it (niv; 1:6/3:21), for the Spirit given to them is 'the Spirit of truth' (4:6; 5:6/14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The relation of Christians to God and to the truth is through Jesus Christ, in whom and in whose love they 'abide' (av), which the NIV a little unfortunately renders either 'live' or 'remain' (2:6, 27, 28; 3:6, 24; 4:13, 15, 16/15:4-10), and who himself lives in them (2:24; 3:24; 4:12-16/6:56; 15:4, 5). His word lives in them too (1:10; 2:14, 24/5:38; 15:7) and they in it (2:27/8:31). Thus they 'obey his word' (2:5/8:51-55; 14:23, 15:20; 17:6) or 'his commands' (2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:2, 3/14:15, 21; 15:10), his 'new command' being that they love one another (2:8-10; 3:11, 23; cf. 2 John 5, 6/13:34). **'The world', however, will 'hate' them (3:13/15:18). They must not be surprised by this. The reason for it is that they no longer belong to the world (4:5, 6/15:19; 17:16), and while remaining in it must not love the things that are in it (2:15, 16/17:15).** Christ has 'overcome the world', and so

AV Authorized (King James) Version, 1611.

NIV New International Version: Old Testament, 1978; New Testament, 1978.

AV Authorized (King James) Version, 1611.

also through faith in him have they (5:4, 5/16:33). The end result of all that Christ has done for, and given to, his people is fullness of joy (1:4/15:11; 16:24; 7:13).²⁴

EYEWITNESS

The clearest and most definite claim of the author of the first letter to be an eyewitness is found in its opening words (1:1, 3). He is announcing his particular emphasis. What he proclaims concerning the word of life, the gospel, he says is 'that which was from the beginning, which we have heard ... seen ... touched ...' **His message is supremely concerned with the historical, audible, visible, tangible manifestation of the eternal. He could hardly have conveyed his meaning more forcefully. He is vouching for his message from his own personal experience.** It consists not of 'cleverly invented stories' (2 Pet. 1:16), but of a historical revelation verified by the three highest of the five human senses: hearing, sight and touch.²⁵

CONFIDENT AUTHORITY OF AUTHOR

The author's authoritative tone is particularly evident in the 'I–you' passages and appears the more striking when viewed in contrast to the humble way in which he associates himself with his readers in some 'we' passages. **There is nothing tentative or apologetic about what he writes. He does not hesitate to call certain classes of people 'liars', 'deceivers' or 'antichrists'. He supplies tests by which everybody can be sorted into one or other of two categories.** According to their relation to his tests, they either have God or have not, know God or do not, have been born of God or have not, have life or abide in death, walk in the darkness or in the light, are children of God or children of the devil. This dogmatic authority of the writer is seen particularly in his statements and in his commands.²⁶

He dares to instruct and to direct in matters beyond the boundaries of the Lord's teaching. Moreover, in doing so he gives no hint that he regards one kind of teaching as

²⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 21–23.

²⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 30.

²⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 36–37.

less authoritative than the other. Some of the commands of which he writes are God's (e.g. 3:23–24; 5:3), some are Christ's (e.g. 2:7; 2 John 5), and some are his own (e.g. 2 John 10–11; 3 John 9). But he does not distinguish between them; he expects them all to be obeyed.²⁷

All this 'would have been impossible for any lesser personage than an Apostle' (Smith). **It is entirely consistent with the unique position occupied by the apostles of Jesus in view of the promises and commission which he gave them. They were to teach others to observe whatever he had commanded them (Matt. 28:20), but he would by his Spirit continue to teach and command through them (John 14:26; 16:12–13; cf. Acts 1:1). It is the bestowal of this authoritative commission and message, together with their eyewitness experience, which constituted the uniqueness of the apostles; and John lays claim to both in the first chapter of his first letter.** It was what he had 'seen' of Christ which qualified him to 'testify', and what he had 'heard' from Christ which qualified him to 'proclaim' an authoritative message to others. **If John's claim to this twofold qualification is a true claim, then his identity is John the apostle.**²⁸

A PASTOR AT WORK WITH PEOPLE HE REALLY KNOWS WELL

A number of authors have argued that the letters of John are to be regarded rather as pastoral than as polemical writings. There is some truth in this assertion. For John certainly exhibits a tender, pastoral care for his readers. His first concern is not to confound the false teachers, whose activities form the background of the letters, but to protect his readers, his beloved 'children', and to establish them in their Christian faith and life. Thus, he defines his own purpose in writing as being 'to make our joy complete', 'so that you will not sin', and 'so that you may know that you have eternal life' (1:4; 2:1; 5:13). **Joy, holiness, assurance: these are the Christian qualities the pastor**

²⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 37.

Smith David Smith, *Commentary on the Epistles of John*, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1910).

²⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 37–38.

desires to see in his flock. John's first letter is 'a masterpiece in the art of edification' (Findlay).²⁹

POLEMICS

Nevertheless, John also has a polemical purpose. His first letter is not a theological treatise written in the academic peace of a library, but a tract for the times, called forth by a particular and urgent situation in the church. **This situation concerns the insidious propaganda of certain false teachers. 'I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray' (2:26), or 'about those who would deceive you' (RSV). Again, 'Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray' (3:7).** The apostle Paul's prophecy to the Ephesian elders about 'savage wolves' (Acts 20:29–30), later repeated to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:1–7; 4:3–4), has evidently come true. John describes them by three expressions, which draw attention to their diabolical origin, evil influence and false teaching. First, they are '**false prophets**' (4:1). A prophet is a teacher who speaks under the inspiration of a supernatural power. The true prophet was the mouthpiece of the Spirit of truth, the false of the spirit of error. This is why examining the teaching of prophets is called 'testing the spirits' (4:1–6). Secondly, they are '**deceivers**' (2 John 7), because they are leading people astray. Thirdly, they are '**antichrists**' (2:18, cf. v. 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), because the substance of their teaching is to deny the divine-human person of Jesus Christ. In each case they are 'many' – 'many false prophets', 'many deceivers', 'many antichrists'. **Once they passed as loyal members of the church, but now they have seceded (2:19) and 'gone out into the world' (4:1; cf. 2 John 7) to spread their pernicious lies. It seems probable that their secession was due to their failure to convert the rest of the congregation, who by their loyalty to the truth had 'overcome them' (4:4).** Yet some who remained must have been left in a wavering and insecure state, so that John needs to write to reassure and strengthen them. **His great emphasis is on the differences between the genuine Christian and the spurious, and how to discern between the two.**³⁰

Findlay George G. Findlay, *Fellowship in the Life Eternal: An Exposition of the Epistles of John* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1909).

²⁹ John R. W. Stott, [The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 19 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 43.

³⁰ John R. W. Stott, [The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 19 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 43–44.

Similar worries apparently motivate some comments in the First Epistle. The nub of the dispute alluded to in 2 John 7 is echoed in 1 John 4:2b-3. The elder insists, in addition, that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22), belief in which assures that one is born of God (1 John 5:1). Those who confess Jesus as the Son of God abide in God (1 John 4:15) and conquer the world (1 John 5:5). Jesus Christ came, not with the water only, but with the water and the blood (1 John 5:6). The denial of such claims is associated with “many antichrists,” “false prophets,” and “liars” (1 John 2:18-19, 22; 4:1, 3b, 5; 5:10). Also considered a “liar” is one who claims sinlessness but disobeys the commandments (1 John 1:10; 2:4), who professes love for God but hates other Christians (1 John 4:20). First John indicates, furthermore, that certain dissidents have broken off relations with the elder and his audience (1 John 2:18-19; 4:1-3). **On its face the evidence suggests that 1 John, like 2 and 3 John, has arisen from an adversarial situation.**³¹

While the Johannine letters bear real marks of contentious literature, we should beware of overinterpreting the evidence. Of the elder’s opponents we have no direct knowledge independent of his imputations, which are scant, vague, and partial. Moreover, some of 1 John’s refutations probably reflect their author’s dialectical style; *he is not always rebutting adversaries, but sometimes provoking friends to self-examination* (see 1 John 1:6-7; 2:9-11; 4:7-8, 19-21; 5:12).³⁰ One’s perception of these epistles’ whispered quarrels should be balanced, therefore, by confessing one’s ignorance of their depth, coherence, and precise profile. “The work of reconstruction is always fascinating,” A. E. Brooke mused. “But we have to remember how few of the necessary bricks are supplied to us, and how large a proportion of the building material we have to fashion for ourselves.”^{31 32}

³¹ C. Black, [“The First, Second, and Third Letters of John,”](#) in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994-2004), 373.

³⁰ See Pheme Perkins, *The Johannine Letters*, New Testament Message 21 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1979) xvi-xxiii; Judith M. Lieu, “‘Authority to Become Children of God’: A Study of 1 John,” *NovT* 23 (1981) 210-28.

³¹ A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) xxxix-xl.

³² C. Black, [“The First, Second, and Third Letters of John,”](#) in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994-2004), 373-374.

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JESUS THE CARPENTER

by
Kari Jenson Gold

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My husband and I recently left the city after a lifetime on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Following in the footsteps of Chip and Joanna Gaines, or better yet, Cary Grant and Myrna Loy in *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (that sublime precursor to the inferior *The Money Pit*), we had dreams and visions along with considerable trepidation. We were more than aware of the potential pitfalls of old homes, and friends warned us of both financial and marital ruin. Indeed, we could recite every line of dialogue from the scenes where the Blandings reel from structural mishaps.

But in the event, working closely with our contractor and carpenters has been one of the most surprising and rewarding revelations of our lives. Expensive, yes. But profoundly fulfilling. The crew members were skilled, imaginative, and hardworking. They were also kind, thoughtful, and funny. They took enormous pride in their work, and finished each day with the tangible results of their labors. I talked with one of the younger men (a former Marine) who is apprenticed to the master carpenter, and he spoke of the joys of his job. Every day, they literally build a home for someone. They change people's lives for the better in immediate, obvious ways. They don't think or write about beauty. They make it.

Yet they have a hard time finding young people who are willing to sign up for this sort of work. Programmed to attend college and find a job doing something with computers, most are unwilling to contemplate another

sort of life. The Ivy League makes a lot of noise about changing the world for the better, but produces mostly hedge fund bankers and consultants. It's way past time that we upend our priorities, rethink our assumptions, and imagine entirely new ways of educating our youth. The young man restoring an old home is or should be worth more than a McKinsey employee. The farmer producing food in a sustainable and compassionate manner is of greater value to the community than another DEI administrator for Facebook. We need to return to the notion of vocations and guilds, and move away from the obsessive focus on college.

Even as I was pondering these ideas, Pano Kanelos, former president of St. John's College (my alma mater), announced the founding of a new educational institution, the University of Austin. Dedicated to the "fearless pursuit of truth," the university seeks to counteract the indoctrination, groupthink, and censorship that now plague academia. Many of the advisers are prominent academics and journalists who have been unjustly "cancelled" by woke mobs and their supine institutions (full disclosure: I know some of those who are involved).

I had assumed there would be some pushback to UATX, but I was astonished by the vitriol—and how much of it came from learned academics and graduates of our country's most elite universities. Those involved with UATX were denounced as "right-wing grifters," "white supremacists," "transphobes," and "bigots." The orgiastic frenzy was breathtaking. The reaction was so extreme, and so ugly, one had to wonder what exactly everyone was afraid of. Established academia, in particular, had a field day for weeks.

The contrast between these recent ugly displays and our time with the carpenters was so stark, so arresting, that I could not stop thinking about it. The daughter of a professor, I had always venerated the life of the mind, the idea of the ivory tower, a place set above and apart—even while recognizing the day-to-day flawed reality. But I have started lately to wonder if there is something inherently pernicious in a life devoted exclusively to the mind. In Dorothy Sayers's *Gaudy Night*, the protagonist Harriet Vane ponders this very question after a particularly disturbing murder is committed in one of the Oxford colleges. Absent a grounding in the physical, in the stuff of daily life, does one necessarily "lose touch" with reality? Does some sort of distortion occur that permits, indeed encourages, the incubation of perverse and destructive ideas?

After all, we have the academy to thank for a world that can no longer admit the difference between a man and a woman, and for a world no longer permitted to say the word “mother”—unless it’s helpful when defending abortion. Of course, this disconnect from reality has a great deal to do with the rejection of God; danger arose when the post-Enlightenment university began to question God’s presence, leading inevitably to the current state of affairs in which God need not apply at all. Recall that Harvard erased God from its motto years before Princeton got rid of Woodrow Wilson. An ivory tower that explicitly excludes God is a dangerous place.

Grounded neither by the daily labors of the body, nor by a relationship with the Father, today’s academy has rejected both our embodied nature and our creaturely nature. We do so at our peril.

Human beings need to read and they need to plant vegetables in the ground. They need to write and they need to clean. The life of the mind can be a precious, beautiful thing, but divorced from the physical, and isolated in an ivory tower that has cancelled God, it leads inexorably to corruption. Jesus, after all, was a carpenter before becoming a rabbi. The disciples were fishermen. Paul, the one academic among them, was happily torturing Christians until he fell off the horse.

So while UATX is a welcome alternative to the current academy—a bold, defiant project in a terrified, woke world—we also need to rethink on a larger scale, envisioning all sorts of new physically and theologically grounded ventures. And perhaps my alma mater’s motto, *Facio liberos ex liberis libris libraque*—“I make free adults from children by means of books and a balance”—might be retooled for a new college of the future to read: “I make free adults from children by means of books and a balance and a handsaw.”

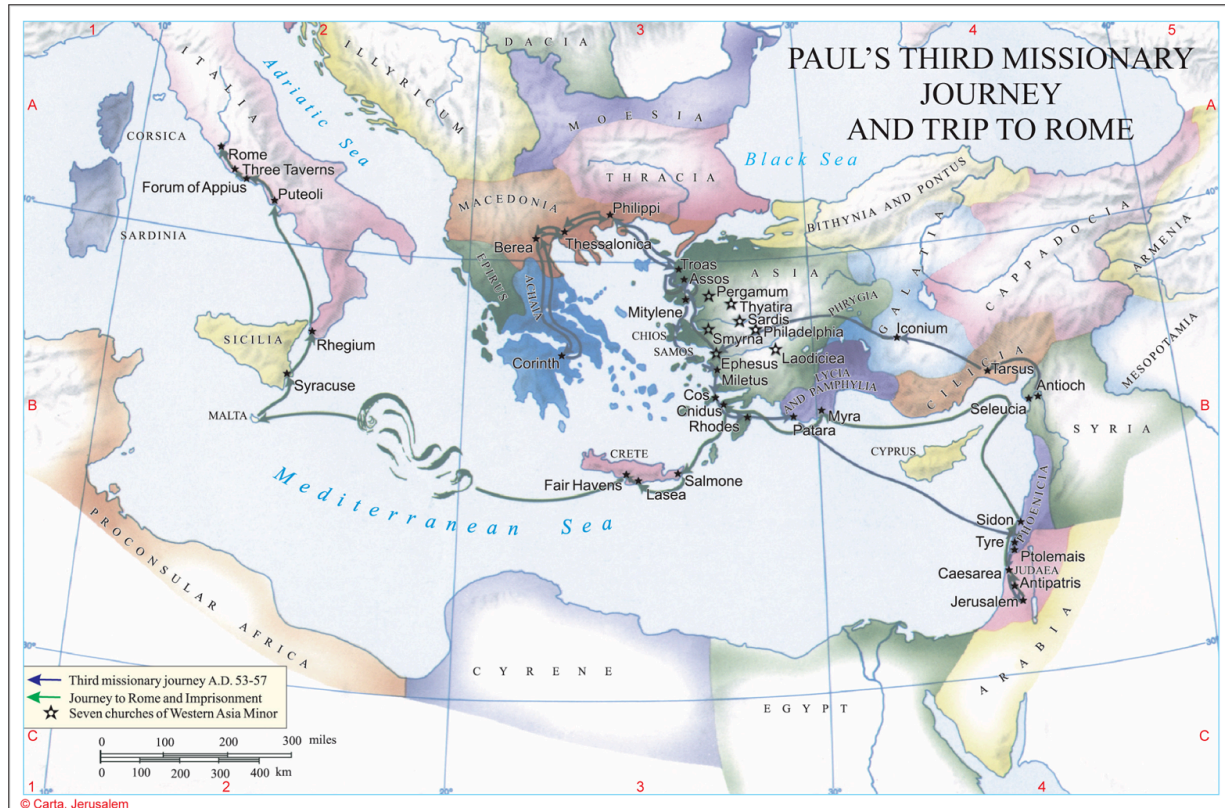
Kari Jenson Gold’s most recent piece for FIRST THINGS was “[Give My Regards to New York](#).”

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Major Themes of the First Letter of John (TNS 10, 1)



Source: George W. Stroup, "[Theological Perspective on 1 John 1:1–2:2](#)," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 394–398.

Is there life after Easter? Not after the first Easter, but after the many Easters that have followed the first, when, to use perhaps the autobiographical words of Paul Tillich, "year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage"?¹ The author of 1 John, writing near the end of the first century, had not seen as many Easters come and go since the first one as had Tillich, and apparently the author still believed that "it is the last hour" (2:18), but he was deeply concerned about his community's understanding of the gospel, especially since there were those intent on

deceiving the community, perhaps even denying that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). How should those he addresses repeatedly as "little children" live as one Easter turns into another and as Jesus' followers continue to find their lives marred by sin?

The writer invokes three theological themes: the *koinonia* Christians have in Christ with God and with one another; the reality and deceptive power of sin; and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is these three themes, taken together, that provide Christians hope as we continue to struggle with sin as one Easter turns into another and "the longed-for perfection of life does not appear."

First, when there is uncertainty concerning the meaning of the gospel, the writer appeals not to a creed or to some formal set of beliefs but to a *koinonia* or fellowship, to a communion, that the writer has "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1:3). Readers share fellowship and communion with the author insofar as they also share communion with the Father and his Son and with one another. Truth, therefore, is not so much a doctrine as it is fellowship with the Father and his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. That fellowship is not based primarily on ideas or philosophical principles but on a person who could be seen and heard and touched—not a spirit or some gnostic savior but a flesh-and-blood human being. He is a unique human being, to be sure, because he is also the "word of life" (1:2) who lived at a particular time and in a particular place, and yet who at the same time was "from the beginning" (1:1), "the eternal life that was with the Father" (1:2).

Second, our text confesses a paradox concerning the reality and mystery of sin. On the one hand, what has been made known or revealed in Jesus Christ is "that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1:5). The world, therefore, is sharply divided between those who live in the light and those who live in the darkness, between those who know the truth and live it and those who are liars. To have fellowship with this Christ, who, according to John's Gospel, is himself the light of the world, is to walk in the light, and to walk in the light is to not sin. "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin" (2:1).

On the other hand, our text recognizes that while Christians should not sin, they continue to do so, and their continuing sinfulness belies what

they confess with their lips. They are liars and hypocrites, and the truth is not in them. They may say they are the children of light, but they are self-deceived when they say they have no sin (1:8). They are caught in a vicious cycle of self-deception from which there is no escape. To be self-deceived is to be unable to recognize one's own deception and to be unable to recognize the truth about oneself.

Our text recognizes the mystery of sin—part of which is its power to deceive. Genesis 3 describes the consequences of the “first sin” as an impulse to hide. Adam and Eve hide themselves behind loin cloths and then hide in the shadows of the garden. They hide from God and from one another by blaming someone other than themselves for their sin (“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree” [Gen. 3:12]). “The dishonesty which is an inevitable concomitant of sin,” wrote Reinhold Niebuhr, “must be regarded neither as purely ignorance, nor yet as involving a conscious lie in each individual instance.”² Because sin is both an act and a state or condition, sinners can neither extricate themselves from their self-deception nor claim victimization and deny their responsibility for it. They are utterly dependent on something (or someone) other than themselves to free them from their lie.

The good news, according to this text, is that those who live in communion with the Father have an advocate, “Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1), who is the atoning sacrifice for their sins—indeed, for the sins of the whole world. Because he is faithful and just, even when those who have communion with him are unrighteous, his followers may confess their sins, receive forgiveness, and be cleansed from their unrighteousness. While the writer files no brief for any particular theory of the atonement, the communion Christians have with God and one another is mediated by “the blood of Jesus his Son” (1:7). Christians who live in communion with God need not deny that they are sinners, or pretend that shadows do not continue to fall across their journey toward the light. They should not despair when in the days and weeks that follow Easter the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, because in the communion they have with God they have an advocate, Jesus the Son, who is righteous, even when they are not, and it is his truthfulness, his atoning sacrifice, that calls them out of the shadows and enables them, with confidence and not in terror, to confess their sins and to walk

toward the light.

NOTES

¹ Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 161–62.

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 1:204.

Source: C. Black, "[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#)," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 374–377.

Major Themes of the Johannine Epistles

The primary subjects to which "the Elder" returns are tightly interwoven, though no more systematically coordinated than those of any NT author. Before engaging in commentary, it is vital that we take our bearings on these letters' theology, with attention to its development beyond the Gospel of John.

1. "God is Light and in Him There is no Darkness At All": The Nature of God. C. K. Barrett's assessment of the Fourth Evangelist may also be pertinent to the author of the Johannine epistles: "There could hardly be a more Christocentric writer than John, yet his very Christocentricity is theocentric."³² If anything, this "theocentric Christocentricity" is clearer in the letters. For the elder, God is the standard of fidelity, of righteousness (1 John 1:9; 3:7), and of goodness (3 John 11), the agent of forgiveness (1 John 1:9; 2:12) whose essential character is light (1 John 1:5, 7), purity (1 John 3:3), truth (1 John 5:20), and, most especially, prevenient love (1 John 4:7–12, 16, 19). From this central understanding of God radiate most of the letters' other themes. Jesus, God's Son, has been sent by the Father as the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). Through the Son (1 John 2:23; 5:20), who enables obedience to his commandments (1 John 2:3–5), all believers "have" or

"know" God (1 John 2:23; 4:7–8; 2 John 9). They abide in or experience a fully reciprocal relationship with God (1 John 1:3; 2:24; 3:24; 4:13–16). Throughout the Johannine epistles (1 John 1:2–3; 2:1, 15–16, 22–24; 3:1; 4:14; 2 John 3–4, 9), the image of God as father is adopted by the elder to convey God's personal and caring nature, not God's gender. Much like John Wesley centuries later, the elder favors a model of God as provider and loving parent.³³

2. "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you": The Traditional Context for Theological Understanding. If God is the magnetic north of the elder's theological compass, then the Johannine *kerygma* ("proclamation") shared with his readers is one pole of that magnetic field. Incisive interpretations of this tradition are not the elder's forte, and its innovative reformulation is not his aim (cf. 2 John 9). Instead, the believing community is repeatedly driven back to "that which was heard from the beginning," a primordial declaration of faith that still impinges forcefully on the church's present experience (1 John 1:1–5; 2:7, 24; 3:11; 2 John 5–6). Although less overtly engaged with Scripture than is the Fourth Gospel (John 5:39, 45–47; 7:23), "the message we have heard and declare" remains wedded in 1 John with OT precept and example (1 John 2:2/Lev 16:16, 30; 1 John 3:12/Gen 4:1–6). The community's faith is crystallized in remembered commandments of Christ (1 John 2:7–8; 2 John 5–6), the example of Jesus (1 John 2:6; 3:16–17), and Christian creedal affirmations (1 John 4:2; 5:6). For proper interpretations of that tradition, the elder recognizes the church's experience of being anointed as "children of God" (1 John 2:20, 27; 3:1–2) and the necessity of "test[ing] the spirits" for their authenticity (1 John 4:1–6).

3. "Children, it is the last hour!" The Eschatological Context for Theological Understanding. The elder's retrospection should not mislead us to think that he and his readers are stuck in the past. To the contrary, the Johannine epistles are attracted to an apocalyptically charged expectation. In this view—played down in the Fourth Gospel (cf. John 3:36; 5:24–29; 6:39–40; 11:23–26) though prevalent in NT documents early (1 Thess 4:13–5:11) and late (2 Peter 3:1–18)—history is hurtling toward its divinely appointed end. Confirmation of this belief lies, for the elder, in the coming of "antichrist" (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). This expression, unique to the Johannine letters, personifies a cataclysmic evil that some expected to flare up before God's final victory (cf. Dan 11:36–12:13; 2 Thess 2:3–9). Not fear, but confidence

(παρρησία *parrēsia*), encouragement, and hope for the church flow from the prospect of Christ's coming (παρουσία *parousia*; 1 John 2:28; 3:2–3; 4:17–18; 2 John 8). This apocalyptic view of the future provides a lens through which the community's present experience is viewed; the elder regards both confession and schism within the church, not as theologically neutral, but as indicators of a cosmic drama, played out under the direction of a provident God.

4. "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh": Who Jesus Is. Since the christology of the Johannine epistles is not systematically presented, one can safely speak only of emphases in the elder's portrayal of Jesus. Undeniably, Jesus is the Christ, "the anointed one" (1 John 2:22; 5:1). That identification of Jesus is exceeded by another: the Son of God (2:22–23; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 20), which, though apparently interchangeable with Christ (5:1, 5), accents his intimate relation with God the Father (1:3; 2:23–24; 4:13). This conjunction is so close that at many points in 1 John it is impossible to tell whether the pronouns "he" or "him" refer to Jesus or to God (see 1 John 1:9–10; 2:3–6, 27–28; 3:23–24; 4:17). This ambiguity may suggest a high christology, effectively equating Jesus with God; or it may simply betoken a lack of precision in the elder's wording. "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2 NRSV) is a confession that, for the elder, appears to have acquired the status of proper doctrine (διδασχὴ *didachē*; 2 John 7–10). That a claim so unobjectionable on its face requires such emphasis, and elicits such sharp repudiation of those who deny it, suggests that Christ's incarnation had become a disputed point within Johannine Christianity at the time of these letters.³⁴

5. "He is the expiation for our sins": What Jesus Does. In general, Jesus in 1 John deals with sin and its consequences. By his blood, believers are cleansed from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7b, 9), their sins forgiven for his sake (1 John 1:9; 2:12). Indeed, Jesus expunges the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2; 3:5; cf. John 1:29). These claims are related to the depiction of Jesus as a ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*), an "atoning sacrifice" for sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). This term is unique to 1 John in the NT, although Romans (Rom 3:25) and Hebrews (Heb 2:17; 9:5) contain cognates. Antecedents for the concept of vicarious expiation by one who is pure or without sin can be found in OT descriptions of cultic sacrifice (cf. Lev 4:1–35; 16:1–34 with 1 John 3:3, 5; 1 Pet 1:18–19), which later were broadened in reference to pious martyrs for the Jewish nation (4 Macc 6:28–29; 17:21–22). For any believer who sins, Jesus

Christ the righteous is an advocate (παράκλητος *paraklētos*) before the Father (1 John 2:1; cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, where intercession is performed by the Holy Spirit). "Anointing" by "the Holy One," which instructs the church and verifies its knowledge, is yet another expression of Christ's (or the Spirit's) benefits (1 John 2:20, 27). An interesting feature of all these models of salvation is that they are confined neither to Jesus' past death nor to his future coming, but are considered perpetually effective in the church's present experience.

6. "Beloved, let us love one another": The Shape of Christian Existence. God's activity in Christ establishes the context for Christian life and self-critical discernment. First John insists on the inseparability of religious experience from moral conduct, with reciprocal testing of the one's soundness by the other's vitality (1 John 1:6–7; 2:3–6, 9–11; 3:6–18, 24; 4:7–12, 20–21). Thus, being "born" of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18) or a "child" of God (1 John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2), "knowing" God (1 John 2:3; 3:6) or "abid[ing] in him" (1 John 2:6, 10, 17; 3:6–10, 24; 4:16), do not describe an inward, mystical state but are concretely manifested by "doing what is right," "keeping his commandments," or "walk[ing] just as he walked" (1 John 2:3, 6; 3:10, 14a, 22; 5:3). By contrast, "the children of the devil," who "abide in death" and falsehood, are recognizable by their unrighteousness, disobedience, and lack of love (1 John 2:4; 3:10, 14b; cf. 3 John 11). Pulsing throughout the First Epistle is a tension, if not contradiction, between candid acknowledgment of persistent sin within the church (1 John 1:8–2:1; 5:16–17) and categorical denial that one begotten of God can sin (1 John 3:6, 9; 5:18). If 1 John does not resolve this theological dilemma, it effectively crystallizes it as a pressing question for subsequent Christian theology.

The observation of Augustine (354–430) that 1 John commends nothing else but love is only slightly exaggerated.³⁵ More than any other concept, love (ἀγάπη *agapē*) expresses the abiding nature of the unseen God (1 John 4:7b, 8b, 12, 16), whose initiative in sending his Son reveals that love (1 John 3:16; 4:9–10), evokes love as a possibility among us (1 John 4:11, 19), and specifies the practical pattern to which our responsive love should conform (1 John 3:17–18; 5:3; 2 John 6). God's love for us (1 John 2:5; 3:1; 4:16–17) and our love for God (1 John 4:20–21; 5:1) are perfected in our sibling love for one another (1 John 2:10; 3:10–11, 14, 23; 4:7, 11–12, 20–21; 5:2; 2 John 5; see also John 13:34; 15:12, 17). While the world's hatred belongs to the sphere of

darkness and is not to be reciprocated (1 John 2:9–11; 3:13–15), the elder's attention to love does appear intramurally preoccupied, the universal potential of the Johannine love command recognized (1 John 2:2; 4:14), yet left undeveloped.

NOTES

³² " 'The Father Is Greater Than I' John 14:28: Subordinationist Christology in the New Testament," in C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 32. See also the finely nuanced treatment by Paul W. Meyer, " 'The Father': The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel," in *Exploring the Gospel of John in Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 255–73.

³³ On the language of God's fatherhood in the Johannine tradition, see B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St John: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1909) 27–34; on the appropriation of that language in our day, see Gail R. O'Day, "John," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 303–4. On Wesley's characterizations of God, consult Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994) 48–64.

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³⁴ See M. de Jonge, "The Use of the Word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ in the Johannine Epistles," in *Studies in John Presented to Professor Dr. J. N. Sevenster*, NovTSup 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 66–74.

³⁵ Augustine, "Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John," in *Augustine: Later Works*, selected and trans. John Burnaby, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955) 259–348, esp. 329.

C. Black, "[The First, Second, and Third Letters of John](#)," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 374–377.